

Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries

UNITED STATES

1. What official directives from government ministries and/or local authorities regarding the teaching of the Holocaust exist in your country? Please attach these directives to your answer.

In the United States, the 50 individual states, not the federal government, are primarily responsible for education policy. Therefore, there is no national curriculum or course of study on the Holocaust that has been created by the government of the United States.

Five states have enacted laws requiring the teaching of the Holocaust. This is known as creating a “legislative mandate.” These states are: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York. Of these five, Florida and New Jersey have created extensive and detailed curricula and guides for the teaching of the Holocaust through their independent state commissions. New York and California have both created less detailed guides through their respective state departments of education, while Illinois has created neither a curriculum nor guides.

Ten other states have regulations encouraging or recommending the teaching of the Holocaust: Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode

Island, South Carolina, and Washington. These regulations are either enacted by state legislatures or by state governors. Those created by the legislature are known as “legislative regulations,” while those created by state governors are known as “executive regulations.”

Twelve states have also created Holocaust commissions or councils that support Holocaust education: Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The scope of these commissions and councils varies widely from state to state.

Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have social-studies standards that are crafted by their respective departments of education (the Alabama Department of Education, the South Dakota Department of Education, etc.). Teachers are required to address these standards—all of which include study of the Holocaust—in their classes. Iowa allows the local school districts to create their own standards, while Rhode Island relies on standards created by the National Center for History in the Schools of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

2. If the Holocaust is not a mandatory subject, what percentage of schools chooses to teach about the Holocaust?

Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have created social-studies standards for their classrooms. As of early 2004, the Holocaust is explicitly named in 24 state standards (Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Ohio, Pennsylvania,

Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia's; it is implicitly identified in the remaining 23 standards when, for example, teachers are asked to address the development and consequences of the policies of National Socialist Germany. As standards play an increasingly important role in U.S. education, it can be assumed that most schools address the subject of the Holocaust.

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as of summer 2004 there were approximately 900 professors teaching Holocaust-related courses at the college and university level in the United States. The Holocaust is also covered in most introductory American, European, and world history courses on campuses across the United States. College- and university-level courses on the Holocaust are included in the following academic disciplines: history, English, philosophy, religion, education, Judaic studies, political science/government, psychology, sociology, communications, anthropology, literature, law, criminal justice, Hebrew language and literature, German language and literature, Eastern and Western European studies, music, art history, classics, geography, linguistics, and public administration.

3. How is the Holocaust defined?

As the guidelines created by the ITF Education Working Group clearly indicate, there are several definitions of the Holocaust. Given the pluralistic nature of American society, the Holocaust is defined in various ways in the United States as well.

America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines the Holocaust as "the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny."

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, another U.S. institution, defines the Holocaust as "the destruction of some 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their followers in Europe between the years 1933–1945. Other individuals and groups were persecuted and suffered grievously during this period, but only the Jews were marked for complete and utter annihilation. The word *Shoah*, originally a Biblical term meaning widespread disaster, is the modern Hebrew equivalent."

Private creators of courses of study on the Holocaust, whether secular or religious, either craft definitions that satisfy their own pedagogical needs or ask students to craft their own definitions.

4. Is the Holocaust taught as a subject in its own right, or as part of a broader topic?

Explain the reasoning behind this decision.

All 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia require students to take a course in U.S. history in order to graduate. Given the belief in a standard-based education that now prevails in the United

States (see question #1), the Holocaust is taught as part of U.S. history. Again, education in the United States is a state—not federal—responsibility. Hence, in some schools the Holocaust may be covered in courses on world history or world cultures.

Given the enormous demographic variations in the United States, it is impossible to identify every course in which the Holocaust is taught. However, according to “The National Study of Secondary Teaching Practices in Holocaust Education” recently conducted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a significant portion of teaching about the Holocaust is done in English or language arts classes, wherein it is more often approached in a thematic manner (e.g., intolerance) than in an historical (or chronological) manner.

Given the U.S. tradition of local control of education, some schools offer separate elective courses on the Holocaust, while others teach it in a comparative manner in courses dealing with genocide.

There is also an extensive system of private education, both secular and religious, in the United States. According to the National Association of Independent Schools, the Holocaust is taught in the history, government, and English/language arts classes in most private schools. Extensive education on the Holocaust is also provided by Jewish religious schools at the secondary level, Catholic secondary-school institutions, Episcopal secondary-school institutions, and secondary schools of other religious denominations.

5. At what age(s) do young people learn about the Holocaust in schools? Do students encounter the Holocaust in school more than once? Please give details.

While topics associated with the learning outcomes of Holocaust education (tolerance, respect for diversity, etc.) can be taught in the lower elementary grades, most students are first introduced to the history of the Holocaust at about age 11 or 12.

Given the repetitive nature of the teaching of history in the United States (i.e., U.S. history is taught at ages 10, 13, and 16), it can be assumed that students will encounter the Holocaust in both middle and high school.

6. How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools?

Taking into account the various manners in which the subject is taught in U.S. schools, one can estimate that one week or two is devoted to the teaching of the Holocaust in most social studies and/or English/language arts classes. This translates into 20 to 40 hours of classroom time, along with homework assignments that vary greatly.

7. In what areas of study (history, literature, sociology, theology) is the Holocaust taught?

In each case, briefly outline the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in this particular subject area.

The areas of study in which the Holocaust is taught are: history, government, social studies, psychology, sociology, religion, philosophy, English, American literature, world literature, reading, writing, speech, advanced placement European history, advanced placement American history, and advanced placement English.

There are six basic rationales:

- The Holocaust was a watershed event in the entire history of humanity.
- Studying the Holocaust helps students learn about the uses and abuses of power and the roles and responsibilities of citizens, organizations, and nations.
- Students develop an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, antisemitism, and stereotyping.
- The Holocaust demonstrates how a modern nation could use its technological expertise and bureaucracy to implement destructive policies.
- The Holocaust provides a context for studying the dangers of remaining silent and indifferent in the face of oppression.
- Students gain an understanding of the complexity of the historical process.

8. a) What historical, pedagogical, and didactic training is provided to teachers of the Holocaust at either the university level or the professional development level in your country?

b) How many teacher-training sessions are held each year, and how many teachers are involved?

c) What funding is available for training in the teaching of the Holocaust in your country?

There are teacher certification laws across the United States. There is in-service training on the local, state, and national levels and independent professional development programs provided by Holocaust museums, resource centers, and other NGO organizations as well by state commissions and/or councils.

For instance, the Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) provides teacher training at centers across the United States. The AHO was established "to serve as a network of organizations and individuals for the advancement of Holocaust programming, awareness, education and research." There are 178 AHO-member organizations in the United States, of which 70 are resource centers and 14 are museums. There are also 50 individual members, who generally are scholars and teachers.

The AHO Directory (www.ahoinfo.org) provides a listing of most of the major NGOs in the United States.

9. Has your country instituted a national Holocaust Memorial Day? If so, in which ways is this day marked and commemorated? What difficulties have you encountered in establishing this day of remembrance in the national consciousness?

Holocaust Remembrance Day has been established to remember the victims of the Holocaust and to remind Americans of what can happen to civilized people when bigotry, hatred, and indifference reign. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is mandated by Congress to

educate Americans about the Holocaust and to commemorate annually its victims in the national Days of Remembrance ceremony. The Museum also encourages appropriate remembrance observances throughout the country.

While there are obvious religious aspects to such a day, it is not strictly a religious observance. The internationally recognized date comes from the Hebrew calendar and corresponds to the 27th day of Nissan, when Israel commemorates the victims of the Holocaust.

10. Has your country established a national Holocaust memorial and/or museum? What numbers of students visit this memorial/museum each year?

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.

Chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980 and located adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Museum strives to broaden public understanding of the history of the Holocaust through multifaceted programs, including: exhibitions; research and publication; collecting and preserving material evidence, art, and artifacts relating to the Holocaust; annual Holocaust commemorations known as the Days of Remembrance; distribution of educational materials and teacher resources; and a variety of public programming designed to enhance understanding of the Holocaust and related issues, including those of contemporary significance.

For the year 2004, approximately 125,000 students visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Sixty-four percent were middle school students (ages 11–14), 35% were high school students (ages 15–18), and less than 1% were elementary students.

11. Please estimate the percentage of students in your country who visit authentic sites, and list three primary sources of funding available in your country for visits to authentic sites.

Given the geographic distance between the United States and authentic Holocaust sites in Europe, and the federal nature of schooling in the United States, it is impossible to estimate the number of students who visit such sites. However, there are national programs, such as the March of the Living and the March of Remembrance and Hope, and individual school initiatives that bring thousands of students to authentic sites.

This year, 1,286 Americans participated in the March of the Living. Approximately 600 were high school students. The rest were survivors, college and university students, and adult groups. A significant number of American Catholic teacher groups took part as well, making the march an intergenerational as well as interfaith effort. Again, given the varied and complex demographics of the United States, we cannot account for what motivated these march participants.

12. What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school textbooks allocate to the Holocaust, and on which aspects do they focus?

U.S. schools rely on a number of private textbook publishers. No government agency, either at the federal or state level, publishes textbooks for classroom use.

The following are the most commonly used social studies/history textbooks in the United States, listed by publisher. Sections on the Holocaust can be found in each.

Holt, Reinhart & Winston

Call To Freedom

The American Nation

Glencoe/McGraw Hill

Human Heritage

The American Journey

History of a Free Nation

Prentice Hall

World Explorer

American History: Pathways to the Present

World History: Connections to Today

Harcourt Brace

The United States in Modern Times

The World

In major textbooks, there are three to five pages of chronological information on the rise of the Nazis, World War II, and the persecution and murder of Jews. Maps of major camps are usually included. The roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations are also stressed in independent publications.

In addition, the following books are frequently used by both social studies and English teachers in the United States to teach about the Holocaust:

The Diary of Anne Frank

Night (Elie Wiesel)

Survival in Auschwitz (Primo Levy)

Finally, both for-profit and non-profit organizations produce educational materials on the Holocaust. For instance, the non-profit organization Facing History and Ourselves publishes the book *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*, which is used in schools across the United States.

13. What strategies of differentiation are typically used to make the study of the Holocaust accessible to students of different ages and with different learning needs?

It is clearly understood that different age groups require different strategies and resources. Students in middle and high school can attempt to understand the complexities of this history, including the scope and scale of the events. While elementary students are able to empathize with individual survivor accounts, they are often too young developmentally to place these stories within a larger historical context.

Civil rights and equal educational opportunity laws in the United States make it illegal to differentiate along ethnic lines when it comes to the presentation of curricula. However, the presence of a major institution, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., allows for the development of programs for local public school students. In smaller communities with resource centers, other programs can also be developed.

14. How far and in what ways is your country's own national history integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust?

The Holocaust is often taught within a unit on war or war crimes/human rights (e.g., World War II, Nuremberg trials, etc.).

15. What are the three major obstacles to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in your country?

Mandated teaching standards

As more states emphasize teaching standards, less time is available for teachers to explore specific areas in depth. The rush to cover a broad amount of historical information necessarily reduces the amount of time teachers have to devote to teaching the Holocaust. In the United States, teaching standards focus more on the acquisition and testing of historical facts than on the development of critical thinking skills necessary to understanding the Holocaust.

Lack of adequate funding

State and local school authorities find it very difficult to fund their regular operating budgets and thus monies for professional development are often eliminated, preventing teachers from receiving adequate training for teaching the Holocaust.

Demands on time within the classroom

Many states are placing additional administrative and assessment burdens upon their teachers, thereby taking time away from academics—including study of the Holocaust. For instance, the requirement for students at various grades to take state assessment tests has decreased the amount of time available for classroom instruction in many U.S. schools.

Mandatory requirements

Closely associated with the standards movement in the United States is the initiative to increase the number of mandatory requirements for graduations. This can limit the number of elective courses that include study of the history of the Holocaust.

Lack of adequate teacher preparation

It is not necessary to have a degree in history to teach history in most U.S. schools. In order to be certified to teach social studies, a teacher must complete a set number of course hours in the social sciences. Thus a person who receives a degree in anthropology—a social science—can be certified to teach a social studies course—wherein the Holocaust is traditionally covered—even though that teacher may lack adequate training in the subject. This is not uncommon in U.S. schools.

Disagreement on rationales

Within a number of academic discipline, from social studies to English to others, there exists a rationale for teaching about the Holocaust. While some teachers focus on the history, others teach the lessons of the history without first ensuring the students have an understanding of the events themselves. This can seriously compromise the quality of instruction students receive.